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About an Old New England Church

By a Young New England Parson

Gerald Stanley Lee

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ABOUT AN OLD NEW ENGLAND CHURCH

An Address on "The Good Old Days"

PUBLISHED AS A SOUVENIR OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF SHARON, CONNECTICUT

BY

REV. GERALD STANLEY LEE

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AS TO YE EVENT

It was on this wise.

In ye year of our Lord, ye eighteen hundred and ninetieth, and of Sharon and ye Sharon Church, ye hundred and fiftieth, on ye thirty first day of December at half after ten by ye clock ye members of ye old Church and all ye Sharonites, and ye Canaanites and ye Ameniaites, and ye Nor-folks and ye Lake-villians, and many more people from these parts, did gather in ye Congregational Meetinghouse to celebrate a century and a half and to bless their forefathers and to wonder at them.

Ye First Part was a devotional exercise, and then after a short waiting time did begin ye Second Part, ye men and women sitting as ye saints have been wont to sit in this church, on separate sides of ye meetinghouse; ye singers clad in ye gown-and-bonnet orthodoxy of ye olden time did sing old Sherburne with mouths wide open and shrill and did make ye "glory to shine all around" until they did have no more breath for to make it shine with, and ye beadle did move to and fro to watch ye young men and maidens and ye sprightly lads, and ye Parson did begin to speak of ye good old days—and ye Parson did keep speaking for a good while, ye singers interrupting him once and again with Judgment Anthems and such like, while ye tables of grandmotherly thrift did show white through ye doors beyond, and ye odor of coming events did

steal over ye pews ;—and then ye events did come, and ye events went—very many plates full ; and ye people did meet again to hear much speaking, and Dr. Hiram Eddy did tell who should speak and what they should speak, and they did speak wisely and wittily and well, so that all did enjoy it, and Dr Eddy did speak all ye time and in between and ye people did enjoy that too, and then ye people did all rise and ye Parson did line out "Blest be ye tie that binds our hearts in Christian love" and ye hearts did all go home with ye benediction of one hundred and fifty years, and all was over, except ye next hundred and fifty years,—and may God bless them—and bless us that they may take after ye hundred and fifty years that are gone.

AS TO YE CONSEQUENCES

"Gentle Reader," be gentle. Here it is. I can't help it. I have done it. I won't do it again. This little book is a grave undertaking, especially in its pleasantry, and it fills me with gravity to think of it; a gravity that both you and I would fain have in the book.

I have but one favor to ask—else we are strangers from the first page: Enter this little volume through the church door, and read it surrounding yourself with the occasion.

I would that I might lend you the original pitch-pipe, we used, to set the tunes with, that Anniversary morning, that you and I might start together on exactly the same key, for unless we do I fear that one of us will flat all the way through—and you will accuse me. Readers always do.

On the following pages are the fatal footprints of a random talk that would not have been so random, if it had known that it was to be tracked with printer's ink. But what is, is, and sadder still, what was, was, and herein is the end of it—except for you—"gentle reader"; and will you please remember in my behalf the 13th of Corinthians as you read, and kindly think of the excellent paper on some of these pages when you can find nothing else to think of. You see—I have been seized with this disease of "Published by request," and I have found that, in trying to trim the wild woods you are about to enter,

into some sort of literary civilization, I could only do it by actually cutting them down and planting all over again, so I have given up, and here they are: a great deal of brush, and thick undergrowths of informality, sprouting all over with "didn'ts" and "don'ts." Some of you, I fear, will be caught in little brambles of expression, and there are a great many tough little roots of phrases that ought to have been covered up, and ambuscades of meaning that ought to have been uncovered—mere Sharonisms, known only to the local mind, and other isms known only, I fear, to my own;—and the paths, with their zigzag logic, you will strangely wonder at, but as you wander through this thicket of nothings, if perchance you find a flower, pluck it, I beg you, while the bloom lasts, and keep it to remember me by and to forgive me with.

Only a little historical effervescence is this: a dash, a sketch, dealing, as sketches do, in the distinctive rather than the true, perhaps.

I have already asked my own forgiveness. I know as the years go on I shall ask it again, and now I ask yours.

GERALD STANLEY LEE

THE PARSONAGE, SHARON
January 20, 1891

FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE DAY

It was a skilful turning of the microscope on to a germ, causing us to see its unfolding and expansion, its growth, bloom, and fruit; climbing the trellis, overspreading the vale, filling the land, bathing its branches in the two oceans, shaking its golden clusters in the face of all nations: PURITANISM, THE GERM, ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AGO.

It was an occasion of singular interest. There were some relics of the olden times—old dresses, old bonnets, old music, with the old "pitch-pipe" and the grand old bass-viol; the sombre old pulpit, from whence the lightnings had flashed with no uncertain sound.

This solemn old pulpit, with the bright young pastor in it, with his scintillations of wit and his flexible style, revealed the striking contrast between the Then and the Now —the Then, with its stern casque and chain armor; the Now, with its armor of light and beauty.

We laughed, yet not in ridicule of something grotesque, but at beauty in its earnest dress, expanding more and more into symmetry by the working out of the true inwardness of the Christian life.

We saw the beauty, and we discovered nothing musty as we inhaled the odor of the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley. It was a rose one hundred and fifty years old, and still all abloom in its modern Sharon.

But Puritanism was more than a rose. It was a tree

of sturdy and magnificent growth, blooming midst the primeval forests. It bloomed there because it had the true life in it; and we, the descendants, were shaking the fruit from the boughs of the old tree—fruit intellectual, fruit æsthetical, fruit social. Matrons there were more than Roman; maidens many and fair, fifty Priscilla Mullers, who seemed to say, but did not, "Why don't you speak for yourself, John?"; tables blooming with floral beauty, loaded with fruits of earth, air, and sea.

All this was enjoyed in the glow of fraternal feeling, rendered sublime by the grandest memories. We felt, with filial devotion, the breath of the fathers and mothers in our festivities and saw the connection of the Past with the Present:

> *"That human things, retreating on themselves,*
> *Move forward, leading up the golden year."*

HIRAM EDDY

ABOUT AN OLD NEW ENGLAND CHURCH: ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS

LET us understand one another to begin with. This is not a history. It is not a study of the principles and trends of thought of the last one hundred and fifty years. It is not an oration. It is not a sermon. It isn't anything, in fact, except just what it happens to be as it meanders along; a kind of semi-historical hap-hazardness; a series of touches and sketches, glimpses, guesses and gases, while an idle fancy wanders wilfully about in the vast roominess of one hundred

and fifty years, tripping along over facts, and, in a wofully reckless and illogical way, not stopping to look just long enough at the great things, but dallying whimsically, I fear, to look just a little too long at the small ones.

If I were to give you an historical address this morning, covering the last one hundred and fifty years, I wouldn't get through in time for our two hundredth celebration; and the dishes have to be cleared away—you know—and all sorts of other practical things that ministers are apt to forget, so I will not detain you with an historical address. Indeed, if I were only to give one minute—one of these light-headed, nineteenth century minutes of ours—to each of these one hundred and fifty years, it would take two hours and a half to deliver it —from which you would wish to be delivered

—and that would be at least two hours too old-fashioned; and though some of you might wish a little more old-fashioned minister, you had rather have him old-fashioned in some other way, and I am sure that if the good Lord has taken one hundred and fifty years to go over all these things, it would be a mistake for me to attempt to go over them in three-quarters of an hour. I have said this so that you may expect nothing, and then you will get just what you expect and go home gratified.

This town and church commenced together. One hundred and fifty years ago this town was the church, this church was the town; and they were so identified that, practically, the church had selectmen and the town had deacons. There is one hundred and fifty years, difference—illustrated—here

in the way of doing things. Nowadays a town is born, and it is some time before the church comes, and the town is born again. Sharon was born and born again at the same time; almost born again before it was born at all. Leadville, we are told, with a population of 125,000, finally secured one minister, and he had five hundred weddings and three hundred funerals in his first year. Towns nowadays start with a depot; then they started with a church. I find the following votes upon the record of the first town meeting of Sharon:

VOTED, "That Nathaniel Skinner, Jonathan Dunham and John Sprague was chosen a Comm'tt to go after a minister."

Further voted:

"That Swin haven a Ring in Their Noses Shall be accounted an orderly *Creater*" [C–r–e–a–t–*e*–r.]

This is certainly the union of Church and State.

As regards the beginning—it is interesting to note that Captain Dunham and Mr. Pardee did not have to go to church. The church came to them, worshipping alternately in their houses, during the winter season; and in the summer, the First Congregational Church of Sharon was a barn. We can imagine our forefathers worshipping there, with the great brown hay-mows reaching away for galleries, the more terrible passages of the sermon likely to be disturbed by the startled screech-scrawch flying of a hen, over the heads of the audience, scared out of her guilty, stolen nest in the hay-loft by the awful denunciations of sinners; while the long seventeenthlies, and deserts of doctrine, in the discourse were *interlarded* with

vague, musical, mystic cadences from the comfortable-looking choir of worthies, too fond of the good things of this world, around the end of the building—squealing in high, spare-rib soprano and grunting in deep, contented bass; and the voice of the rooster rose high in the singing of the psalms.

This was in 1740. In the spring of 1741 a new meeting-house, built of poles, and measuring thirty-six by twenty, was erected; and the next one, which was four or five years in being completed, was forty-five by thirty-five feet, and was located in the middle of the street, opposite the tavern. Several of our churches have been in the middle of the street, typical of the old life, in which a man either had to go to church or go decidedly out of his way not to. A bell

was offered by Hon. Philip Livingstone for this church, if the town would build a steeple. This called out a vote of thanks, but the vote failed to materialize into timber enough for the steeple, and Mr. Livingstone's bell has not come yet. Possibly they put on an injunction instead of a steeple. This was our first bell difficulty. Perhaps, because at this time the town wanted a bell and couldn't get it, some of our city friends, with a keen sense of providence, are laboring under the impression that now the town has a bell and doesn't want it.

The first pastor was Rev. Peter Pratt. History records that he was treated very handsomely by the church, the special points emphasized being that he was supplied with firewood, and that when he went to Lebanon to marry his wife they paid the

expense of hiring a horse and wagon, that he might becomingly bring her to Sharon.

(I wonder if you would do as much for me?)

Mr. Pratt was an active and able man, interesting himself in affairs, upholding the rights of the Indians, and starting mission-work among them, and saving the financial life of the colony by a petition to the Assembly. But Providence seems to have selected him as a temperance lesson to the community, for he was so handsomely treated in making his pastoral calls that it began to be noticed that he was nearly as bibulous as he was biblical; and the parish found itself forced to the painful conclusion that he was not dry enough even for a minister, and, after much gathering of indignation, on the ninth day of January, 1746, the town

solemnly voted, as a terrible blow, that they would no longer supply him with firewood. But this had only a temporary effect, and he was dismissed by council from the church in 1747.

Mr. John Searl was the next pastor, after being employed three months as a candidate, which, by the way, is the habitual custom of this church, a precaution probably originating in their sad experience with Mr. Pratt. He has cast a suspicion over all the rest of us!

Mr. Searl was loved and respected by his people, but his failing health required him to resign after five years.

It would seem as if history loved to indulge in a little flourish of epigram—that of two pastors, at this time, the one should have had to leave for his health, and the

other for the health of the church. But, to atone for all these things, God had in store for us a half-century blessing in the consecrated pastorate of the Rev. Cotton Mather Smith, whose influence is so woven into Sharon that the history of the town could almost be said for this time to be his biography, with a few foot-notes of other things.

He was pastor for fifty-two years, and every death and birth and wedding linked him to the love of Sharon. That was a pastorate! And how the nobility and possibility of it contrast with the ecclesiastical fussiness and religious squeamishness of our modern ways—employing ministers as spiritual hired men for a season, and then walking out some fine morning and telling them they may go; or having them walk into the

house at any time to inform us that they have something else in view and want to leave day after to-morrow. Parson Smith was not a preacher who stopped to speak to Sharon a few minutes on the way to preaching somewhere else—like unto some men; but he was an institution of the town —a kind of college in himself—abiding always in the community, and sending out, like class after class, the influences and the growths and inspirations of his large nature—upon the lives of men and women —through all these momentous years.

Whitfield was here in 1770, and it was the influence of the liberal consecration of Parson Smith that gave the great gospel Hercules a hearing in the church; for many were opposed—and he was expecting to speak in the orchard across the street. He

was entertained by Parson Smith at his house as well as in his pulpit, and the congregation to hear him was so large that scaffoldings were erected all around the meeting-house—that the crowds might listen through the open windows.

The Congregational Church of Sharon fought in the Revolutionary War: Rev. Cotton M. Smith Commander; that is, figuratively speaking. Mr. Smith was willing to put his religion into politics, and his politics into bayonets. The news of the Battle of Lexington came on Sunday—and the pastor announced it from the pulpit, with a speech like a war-bugle; and, immediately after the congregation had bowed to the benediction, the militia and volunteers paraded up and down before the meeting-house in a kind of praise-service of war, and prepared imme-

diately to march to the field; and Parson Smith, martial—as a modern David—not free by his calling to go and fight against the British, went with the army to the North to pray against them, as chaplain to Colonel Hinman's regiment. One of the hymns frequently sung at Sabbath worship, in which our sturdy forefathers were wont to cannonade forth their pent-up feelings, began with this verse:

"Let tyrants shake their iron rod,
And slavery clank their galling chains,
We fear them not, we trust in God,
New England's God forever reigns;"

and the feeling ran so high that undoubtedly some of the good saints would have had their faith wonderfully shaken if they hadn't thought that God was on their side, and possessed of a decided prejudice

against the British; and while they were using the new church to store up indignation against the enemy, they used the old one as a storehouse for powder and arms.

These were exciting times. Election sermons were common all over the land, and the ministers not only preached the law of Moses and the gospel of Christ, but the law of New England and the gospel of standing stoutly for our rights. Several ministers fought and preached alternately. The pastor of the Congregational Church in Sturbridge, Mass., not being able to go himself, sent a cask of powder, to blow his wrath all over the British at the expense of one-fifth of his salary, while one of his deacons furnished bullets to match; and the First Church in Boston held a meeting to vote that the lead-weights of the clock be

melted into bullets, and other metal substituted instead.

Rev. Cotton Mather Smith's patriotism and ability made him widely known, and carried the name of Sharon to where it otherwise would not have gone. His force and courage won the admiration of all who knew him or heard of him, and gave him a close friend in General Schuyler, his commander. At the time of Burgoyne's march from the North, news had come to Sharon of two doubtful battles and a third imminent, which brought all men and women to church, Sunday morning, with but one great, eager thought, and one awful dread, while the children were all still with wonder. Parson Smith preached a never-to-be-forgotten sermon on the text: "Watchman, what of the night? The watchman

saith, The morning cometh." He appealed to their faith, and their valor, and prophesied a victory, and—as a magnificent climax that God had been arranging—all the way from Saratoga, a messenger arrived at the close of the sermon with the news that our arms were overwhelmingly victorious and that Burgoyne had surrendered; and when the pastor read the letter from the pulpit, if the hallelujahs of those anxious, listening hearts could have been put into music, the echo of them would be sounding yet, and they would not have waited to line them out either.

The first Methodist preaching in Sharon was shortly after the war; Parson Smith, being somewhat opposed on doctrinal grounds, holding a discussion with Mr. Garrison, their preacher. There was much op-

position in the community, and the Methodism of Sharon commenced, paradoxically, in the ball-room of Gallow's Tavern; but, owing to the fact that the town authorities threatened to take away the license of the tavern-keeper if he allowed any more Methodist gatherings there, the meetings were moved to private houses, and held every two weeks on the afternoon of a week-day. For a saloon-keeper to be expelled from a church is very commonplace; but where is there another church that has the unique charm and interest of having been expelled from a saloon? It is to be hoped that our Methodist brethren will keep on doing all that they can to return the compliment, and take their turn in having the expulsion the other way. The preaching was marked by great earnestness and freedom and with

many conversions. History records that Andrew Harpending, a preacher of some note, as a large crowd was leaving the Congregational Church, made a pulpit of a table and preached so powerfully to the assembled multitude that a young lady half a mile away, standing in the open window of her room, distinctly heard all that was said, and under its influence was brought into the Christian life. This is the most striking instance of long-distance conversion I have ever heard of, although I imagine that our Methodist brethren have lifted up just as many souls by dropping their voices as they used to in the good old days by raising them.

Let us now try to place before ourselves a general idea of the characteristics and conditions of church life and worship in those good old days.

As regards the position of the minister in the community, it was well expressed by the word "parson," which literally means "person"—"The Person" in the parish. This is very august. He had a complete monopoly in all the materials of the intellectual and spiritual life of his people. He had no competition. Nowadays a minister enters practically into competition with all literature, with the telegraph and newspaper, and people cannot keep him as a pastor but just about so long, for fear of finding out how little he knows.

He must be as full of facts as an encyclopædia, as full of knowledge of human nature as a novel, as interesting as a play, as close to life as a newspaper; he must have the style of the Ruskin on the library tables at home, the eloquence of Carlyle, the

prophet-tone of Emerson, and the imagination of Shakespeare. He must be a whole library in himself, both for ready reference and to be drawn on at will; and, to say nothing of calling on every one before he calls on any one else, with a kind of miniature omnipresence of the Being he stands for, he must take a post-graduate course in omniscience and know as much about everything as each specialist of a man knows about anything. One can hardly wonder if even a man like Parson Smith, had he come to Sharon in 1854 instead of 1754, would not have resigned—or even fallen in with the modern style of being asked to resign—by this time. Isaiah himself wouldn't have remained in a modern pulpit fifty-two years —and, if he had, probably the church would have valued him so highly as to feel called

upon to help him resign for some other church. It was because the 271 pastors in Massachusetts in 1776 were public libraries, lecture bureaus, magazines and newspapers, all in themselves, that 233 of them retained their pastorates until death; and the parishioners of Joseph Adams, who preached to his people for sixty-eight years, did not read the Sunday edition of the New York *Blank*, nor possess the rival attraction of a modern apostle of Mars Hill gesticulating by telegraph for the national edification.

In the good old days people were taxed for the minister just as they were taxed for the highways. The straight and narrow path was a State road in those days, and our forefathers evidently intended to keep the roads as well open to the next world as they were in this (although it is to be

hoped that our road to Sharon Station will not be taken as an example to the churches).

In some towns the minister was so unworldly that the town appointed a steward to manage his affairs for him. In others, there was a small farm attached to the parsonage, and the parson was often as much of an authority on onions and potatoes as he was on the Garden of Eden and the ten commandments; and there is a story to the effect that one good dominie was so famous for his onions that his sermons were more flavored with them than with theology, and his people were more proud of his orchard than they were of his eloquence. One of his deacons is reported as saying: "Waal, our minister gives so much attention to his farm and

orchard that we get pretty poor sermons; but I tell you one thing, brethren, he is mighty movin' in prayer in caterpillar and cankerworm time."

Every one was obliged to go to church in those days, and inspectors roamed the fields for truants. There are many cases of discipline on record for failure to be at services, and, if any persons were caught standing and talking about the meeting-house while a service was going on inside, the church appointed a committee to go and labor with them that they might reflect, repent, and mend the evil of their ways. Members of the Horseshed Class in our Sunday School, please notice. Because Balaam's ass prophesied, it does not follow that all four-footed beasts of burden are capable spiritual advisers.

While the New England parson has been somewhat misrepresented in literature, there is a great deal to bear out the general statement that religion, in the old days, was lit up with a decidedly lurid glare and consisted, with many saints, largely of a deep feeling that something terrible was going to happen.

Speaking with strict qualification of the more common people, and bearing in mind how much ignorance there was, and how this coarseness and ignorance would affect the preaching that tried to reach it, making it a gospel of strong measures and overdrawn appeals to the senses, it was too true that God to many was a Brooding Awfulness, the church apparently using the spirit of the sword rather than the Sword of the Spirit. Religion was often a kind of baptized morbidness, a scared righteousness; piety was a

kind of tremulousness of the soul under Sinai, and the doctrine of the sovereignty of God was so unfortunately exaggerated that the greatness of the place of the soul in the plans of God was crowded into a mere rat-hole, in the popular conception of things: so that all the universe, with the stars on the watch, was on a mighty still-hunt for the guilty soul of man, peering out of the mouse-nest of his sins, watching for a chance to fly from the general doom of things; and sainthood, in the case of many ignorant people, was a kind of running—a running not of the race that is set before us but from the doom that chases behind us—and to a remarkable degree the atmosphere was so full of brimstone that religion sometimes seemed caricatured, in the popular mind, as a kind of vast theological fire-escape, and

Mount Sinai so loomed up over Mount Calvary that it is no wonder we are carrying the reaction a little too far nowadays.

The choir interrupts to carry on the idea musically, and to the tune of "Greenwich" touchingly renders the following poem:

"Lord, what a thoughtless wretch was I
To mourn, and murmur, and repine
To see the wicked placed on high,
In pride and robes of honor shine.

"But, oh, their end! their dreadful end!
Thy sanctuary taught me so!
On slippery rocks I see them stand,
And fiery billows roll below!"

With this conception more or less common among the mass of church-goers, it is very easy to see how the minister might take some of the awfulness brooding about him unto himself, and so far forget the,

"Suffer little children to come unto me," that the little children certainly *did* suffer if they had to come unto him. But underneath all the sternness there was a deal of sweetness and a kind of beautiful, austere gentleness; and it is one of the charms of the old New England character of the highest type that many and many men were quaint contradictions of their theology, while its cold, bold, rocky outlines only made an impressive background for the beauty of the spirit of their lives. And please remember that I have said this—and feel this, through all else that I say; for, indeed, the beauty of men is ever the truest thing about them—the part that God remembers and that ever lends its undying sweetness to the following lives, whether they know it or not: too beautifully elusive,

too divinely diffused, to be gathered into the clumsy words of a sketch like this, while the vulgar obtrusiveness of theologies and customs brings them to the foreground. How true it is that, while men have never been as good as their religion, they have always been a deal better than their theology.

There is one rule of the old New England life that seems to me to be especially commendable. I am thinking of proposing that it be made a rule of this church—at the next church-meeting: "If any person or persons shall be guilty of speaking against the minister—in any shape, form, or manner—or of speaking against his preaching, said person or persons shall be punished by fine, whipping, or banishment, or cutting off of ears." This needs no comment. It

speaks for itself. The cutting off of ears is particularly fitting—though I wonder a little that no provision is made for tongues in the matter. It seems to me that a little old-fashioned ruling of this kind would be very beneficial—and would summarily do away with the prevalent idea, among pew-holders of modern times, that a man pays his pew-rent as a fee for the privilege of grumbling, with a tacit understanding that he can grumble to an amount twice the value of the fee if he pays cash down. Those were good old days.

The first church-edifices were generally three stories high, with heavy beams crossing overhead, bare and unsightly, except as embroidered—as used to be the case occasionally in one old church in Massachusetts—

with sprightly lads swinging their legs over the heads of the congregation, and brushing the dust down into their powdered wigs. Kegs of powder, before stoves were introduced, often lay along these beams—in sullen vindictiveness—as a kind of barrelled-up illustration of what poor sinners could expect, who didn't mend the evil of their ways, and heed the sermon. Square pews were not introduced at first; but when they were, they had seats that turned on hinges, so that when the people, rising according to their custom for the prayers, prepared to sit down again, the slam-banging of the seats was like a volley of musketry, as if a salute had been fired because the long prayer was finally over.

As regards attending worship—in those days, people came to it in their every-day

shoes; and one of the interesting features of entering the house of God was watching the worshippers reverently changing their shoes at the door, and then slyly poking around in the bushes for nice little nooks to hide their old ones in during the service.

The service opened generally with the singing of a psalm, which was lined off and sung in nasal strains—for the nose was one of the musical instruments in those days; and though noses are not out of date, by any means, we have lost the cunning of our ancestors, and only a random genius here and there can strike an old-time note upon one under the passing inspiration of a cold.

The prayers were preceded by requests for prayer—read from the pulpit. Each case was then taken up. The prayers were always at least fifteen minutes long—very often twice

or thrice as long—probably on the assumption that it took the Lord fully ten minutes to get interested in a prayer, and that He was just about ready to listen when the audience was through.

Two travellers from abroad wrote home as follows—of the exercises on a certain day for fasting and prayer:

"We went into a church where, in the first place, the preacher made a prayer one hour and fifty minutes in length, after which another minister delivered a sermon an hour long. In the afternoon three or four hours were consumed with nothing but prayers, three ministers relieving each other alternately—when one was tired the other went up into the pulpit."

Rev. Thomas Clapp, of Taunton, in a volume of his sermons, had a scheme of one of his prayers in the introduction.

It is divided into five general heads, with

subheads, and makes a total of two hundred and forty subheads (one for each head in the audience).

It seemed to be the feeling that preachers did not earn their salaries unless they talked to the people a good deal longer than they did to the Lord, and the eloquent preacher was frequently the one who had the gift of powerfully not knowing when to stop.

The old saying, that brevity is the soul of wit, was taken by our Puritan ancestors with much seriousness—and possibly it is because they felt that wit was out of place in the pulpit that they made such elaborate endeavors to keep brevity out of their sermons.

A certain preacher of the olden time had turned his hour-glass once in the sermon, and was about to turn it again, when he

found that the congregation, one by one, were slipping out; and, finally, when it was turned for the beginning of the third hour, the weary clerk audibly asked his reverend superior to lock up the church and put the key under the door when the sermon was done, as he and a few remaining auditors were going home. The sermon proper was generally an argument—and this was followed by what was called an "Improvement"—which, like much of our finite improvement, sadly failed to improve.

But I must say something upon the subject of music, or, rather, upon the subject of discords, for Providence seems to have scattered more evidences of the exceeding humanness of human nature along our church history in connection with music than anything else. The first discord recorded in

our church is a musical discord. The voice of the heretic was heard in the land. The younger members of the church wanted to sing in the "new way." I suppose they might be called the members of the Christian Endeavor Society of 1773. They claimed that the lining out of hymns was not necessary, that it made the worship seem like a district school, that the custom was originally instituted because in the earlier days few people knew how to read, that it was not impressive, that it was a kind of pious puttering. "It takes the edge off the words to have a full rehearsal before every line. If we are going to have singing and praise the Lord, let's have singing and praise the Lord, and not this practising at praising Him—as if we didn't understand it or He didn't understand us,"

etc., etc. The older and wiser heads, however, got themselves together, and, as if they had a copyright on all the wisdom of eighteen centuries and an injunction on all that was to come, told the young people, "quietly but firmly," that this "could not be." Lining out the hymns was more solemn, and, besides, it took longer; and the longer anything took the more holy it was, of course. But this did not satisfy, and the heretics swelled in numbers—and logic—and again made charge.

The town shook.

The wise heads said: "Lining out is solemn." Said the foolish: "Lining out is ridiculous." Profundities passed to and fro, deep calling unto deep.

The town shook.

Said the wise ones: "Lining out is the

only right way. IT'S THE WAY WE HAVE ALWAYS DONE, AND THAT SETTLES IT." But it didn't settle it. An argument as old as that ought to have settled anything—but it didn't.

The war waged.

The feeling ran so high that the "air" was full of it, and so deep, that it spread to the other parts, much of it descending so far, I am sorry to say, as to be of a decidedly bass tenor; men and women all quarrelling as if the whole town were a big choir. Most of the arguments seem to have been in sharps, though many of them would be transposed into flats nowadays. The *tempo* was amazingly rapid, and all was rendered *fortissimo;* until one is reminded, in looking over the score, or, rather, the scoring, of the magnificent Baal Chorus in the

"Elijah," each side calling upon its gods, with its, "Oh, Baal, hear us!" and cutting themselves, after their manner, with knives and lancets, or, rather, one another (metaphor), until it must have been nearly as interesting to Baal and his relatives as it is to us; and I do not doubt that they were there.

Oh, the arguments rubbed vigorously out in wash-tubs! The invectives strung along the clothes-lines! The epithets that were churned in with the butter! The bitterness that was skimmed off the milkpans, and the sturdy farmer's, "I won't give up," planted with his potatoes! But history records that, when the potatoes were pulled up, the "I won't" was pulled up too, and the lined-out hymns had fallen from grace and good and regular standing in the sanctuary.

It was in this wise. The first victory was in getting a trial of the new way for two months. Then the final question came up—the older ones claiming that they had all the past of the world on their side, and the lovers of the new way insisting that they had all the next world on theirs, for they were sure that the angels didn't have any lining out of hymns in heaven. Whereupon the older ones talked as if they didn't care to go there unless they did, and would like to have the matter decided before they started, worrying some of the hotter youth into the wish that they would go and see for themselves at once; the cooler youth suggesting that, under the circumstances, it would be wise to know how to sing in both ways. They knew how in the old way, and had better spend the rest of their lives in

practising on the new, and then they would have a sure thing of it. The older ones replied that, if they actually did sing in the new way in heaven, the younger ones might just as well wait until they reached there, and sing in the old way while they had a chance. This was certainly reasonable. But it was of no avail. Possibly, from a guilty sense that, if they postponed singing the new way, to heaven, they might not be on hand for their parts, the young people sinfully insisted, and on a fatal night in 1773 the agony came to a culmination in a vote of the church to sing in the new way, and on the following Sunday the church was compelled to listen to the following startling innovation:

(Choir sings "New Durham," without lining out.)

Now, any one can see that such a shockingly modern performance as this would outrage the feelings of the audience. The result was, as appears from the vote of the next church meeting, that half the congregation were so filled with righteous indignation that they could not find breath to sing at all. Some of the choir thought that this rather improved the singing, and the improvement was kept up with vigorous silence for some time. On the 12th of November, 1784, John Common was brought before the church to be disciplined for "regularly absenting himself from public worship," and he made the statement that:

"Whereas, when he first joined with this church, the method of singing was line by line and singing such tunes as he could understand, and whereas the church have voted to omit reading line by line and singing such tunes as were thus intelligible to

him, therefore he cannot with good conscience join with such singing."

This musical martyr was not alone; but there were other heroes in the good old cause, capable of mounting to the same height of discord, and self-sacrifice in staying at home from church for conscience's sake. Whatever may be said about great causes bringing out great men, little causes certainly bring out the greatness of little men.

As an outcome of several incidents of this kind, on November 4th I find the following record:

"Whereas, there appears in the mind of some of the brethren of this church an uneasiness on account of the late method of singing, especially on account of its being confined to so small a number. In order, therefore, for general peace and union, it is agreed that one half of the time the old tunes shall

be lined out and sung with reading line by line, and that a number of persons shall be desired to sit below in order to assist in singing both tenor and bass, and ye other part of ye time ye new tunes may be sung without reading line by line."

So for the following year our ancestors for all the morning services sang in the proper way, which was this:

LET US SING THE TWELVE HUNDRED AND FIFTH HYMN! 1205.

("Coleshill" is lined out and sung by the choir.)

And in the afternoon the hymns were sung without being cut off and handed to the audience in cold slices; alternating elocution and execution after the old and correct manner, like a course of sacred sandwiches in music. In February, 1775, the church voted that all hymns should be

sung without lining, and no linings have ever been put in since—until to-day. We had no deacon in the church at that time, who, like Deacon C———, of M———, braved the whole congregation of heretical non-liners, and lined out the hymns faithfully all by himself, like a lion at bay, until the choir overpowered him, and he walked with a kind of lordly, excommunicating air out of the church.

No statue has been erected to his memory.

As for Sharon, in spite of the fact that many in the congregation maintained a grim and saintly silence during the paganism of unlined hymns, things grew worse and worse until the choir actually degenerated into anthems, and religion occasionally dwindled away into mere duets and

trios, with frequent excursions into the worldliness of musical novelties: and do you wonder that many objections were raised, when the choir actually held rehearsals and favored the congregation on Sundays with elaborate operatic airs like this?

(CHOIR SINGS JUDGMENT ANTHEM.)

Hark! hark! ye mortals, hear the trumpet
(Bass) Sounding loud the mighty ROAR.
Hark the archangel's voice proclaiming,
Thou, old time, shalt be no more.
His loud trumpet, his loud trumpet,
(Bass) Rend the tombs: YE DEAD, AWAKE!
See the purple banner flying,
Hear the Judgment chariot roll. R–O–L–L.

(Judgment chariot rolls. Rolls some more. —R–O–L–L–S—rolls a good deal more. Rolls up into the soprano and down into the bass, off on to the tenor and along on the alto—

ROLLS! Rolls for fifteen minutes, more or less, all on one syllable, and then slides off on to another, and rolls again. ROLLS! How that Judgment chariot rolls! and then, finally, comes to a jerking short stop on the last note, and ends with a wonderful musical thud, and rolls no more. Congregation, which had been rising and facing the music, or, rather, the chariot, is seated.)

Now, any one can see that such intricate convolutions of sound must have had a very baleful effect upon the moral life of the community. Such stately trills, alternating with such worldly wigglings of melody and artistic quavers, to say nothing of the profane and thrilling holding of the breath for such a long period of time, turning the worship of the Lord into a mere exhibition of breathing exercises, caused a sensation that can be

better imagined than described, and which, if it could be set to music, would be one of the most expressive compositions in the history of sound.

There is always an old way and always a "new way"; the quarrels of yesterday are but our own quarrels on different subjects. The past generations are but historic masquerades on ours, and in them we see our own faults, with an old date on them, and with circumstances just enough disguised so that we do not recognize the fact that we are laughing at ourselves. There is a curious sameness in human nature—through all the old ways into all the new ones; but all things must change, and the relevancies of one day are the irrelevancies of the next, and the sublimity of one age the fun of another world without end. God alone can untangle

the great essentials of the coming of His Kingdom from our prejudices, and God alone can overcome the stiffening of our joints into custom and the curious confusion of our minds between what is right and what we are accustomed to; and the world moves on, and keeps moving, and we must learn to rejoice in its progress, even though it bring to us the sadness of moving away from ourselves. It is not moving away from the best in us, but only from that which it does not need, and moving to that which it needs more.

I have been struck, in looking over the church records, with their complete failure to really reflect the *life*—the real nobility and beauty—that this church has stood for in Sharon.

The curt language of "Yeas and nays"—

of "Voted and passed," as seen in the records, can no more express the great motherly heart of this church, brooding over these one hundred and fifty years, going out to the needs and hopes of this village, than a man's account book will tell you the real life of the man, with the yearnings and the strivings and the triumphs of his spirit; or than our religion can be spelt out in figures, or the love of God revealed to souls in geometry. The church record is the mere steward of the church, and is not the spirit but the body of history, giving you only glimpses—through the loophole of an inference—into the great soul-life going on beyond.

For instance, a revival will be sketched out in a few naked figures at the bottom of a page; and the case of John Blank, who paid four shillings to a brother church mem-

ber for something worth two shillings, and didn't want to heap coals of fire on the head of the dear brother who had cheated him unless he could do it literally, would occupy as much space as if it had been the main event of the year: and it is surprising how, in turning over the leaves, discipline cases seem so numerous that one feels that it must be a record of sinners instead of saints. I remember being much impressed, however, with the spirit and wisdom of Parson Smith in the case of one Mabel, who had been guilty of absenting herself punctually and regularly from Sabbath services, and who, after being labored with by numerous committees and sub-committees, and committees on more committees, was finally cut off from communion. The letter doing it is one so rich in contrasts of love and consci-

entious severity that one is almost glad that Mabel stayed away from church a few Sundays in order to thus bring out the rare spirit that moved in the life of our old father-pastor, Cotton Mather Smith. Votes of excommunication were passed very impressively. It was a vote of silence. All those in favor of it were to so indicate by keeping still after the question was put. Not a voice was lifted, while the air was heavy with condemnation and the sad sentence of unopened lips, as if the Lord were doing it and not they, the guilty one being cut off from the church with not a word spoken against him—only the hush that left the soul with God!

So many pages in the record are taken up with the notices of marriages that in places it looks more like the record of a matrimonial society than of an ecclesiastical one.

It was an epoch in the history of this church when it purchased its first stove. It was in the early years of Parson Smith that the society voted that a committee look into the matter of the "practicability of having a stove." It is recorded with all the ponderousness of a very important and revolutionary event. When the committee reported in favor of warming the building, those opposed to it seemed to try to make it unnecessary, by making it warm in other ways. There were two parties. Both parties were warm; but one party was warm because it wanted to be warm, and the other, because it didn't want to be warm. There had never been any heated discussions in the church before—at least, only those heated by foot-stoves—and it was considered orthodox to freeze. "*We had always*

frozen." Religion was better cold. Our forefathers had always pronounced the benediction with mittens on, and if a stove was put in the mittens would have to be taken off, and the old people did not like a benediction without mittens, and it would be an innovation. (Possibly the argument was something like this, but I do not know. No stenographers were present.) People who were taxed three and a half cents on a dollar for their preaching wanted to SEE their sermons as well as hear them; and when you could actually see the "firstly," "secondly," and "thirdly" coming out of the minister's mouth, in beautiful, frosty outlines, there was a certain tangibility about it that made it plainer, somehow, and made up in a degree for the abstract quality of the points, breathing a kind of spirit into them.

Perhaps this was it. But it was of no avail. The stove was put in, and things went from bad to worse until religion seemed in a way to be made so comfortable that all the piety would be taken out of it, and it really looked as if, as a last resort—if a man was to have any religion at all—he would have to put it into the spirit of his life, instead of being sanctimoniously miserable a few hours every Sunday and feeling as if he had done something for the Lord. Mr. Smith asked for an assistant in the forty-ninth year of his pastorate, and the church called Mr. Perry; and when, at last, the great heart had passed away, the heart that had stirred so many lives with its strength and courage, and soothed so many griefs with its peace, the heart that had built fifty years of itself into the very

foundations of this town, it took all Sharon and two generations to measure all that God had done for us in him: and God is not through yet, for the spirit of Cotton Mather Smith lives over and over again in that beautiful posterity of human souls, and that wonderful genealogy of unseen descendants, in the thoughts and lives of men, that God is ever weaving out of the influences of a soul for centuries after He has taken the soul to Himself.

The fifty years of his pastorate here were only the arc of a circle that God is ever finishing, and though Mr. Perry was called to be his assistant, all of us who have followed have been but the assistants of Cotton Mather Smith; for he is working here yet. Men never die. Every touch of influence from a human life has its ripple upon

the farthest shore of history. A good deed is never childless, but is the Adam of an immortal race that goes on multiplying through all the generations of men; and, though God may take a *man* from us, the thoughts that were the children of his soul go moving to and fro across the restless spirit of the world forever and forever!

Mr. Perry was our pastor for thirty-one years. His work began with a revival. The Sunday School was started by him in 1818, Deacon William Smith being the first superintendent, holding the office, after what seems to have been the Smith custom, for nearly fifty years. "Smith" seems a semi-centennial name. We regret that the Superintendent Smith who has just resigned has not lived up to it. This present building was built out of the conversion of souls, a large in-

crease making a new house possible. The church has had eleven pastors, and a total membership of 1,217 souls. Of the original members, the only two represented among us by their own name, in the male line, are Deacon Ebenezer Jackson and Deacon Ebenezer Hamlin, by which it would appear that Providence has a special leaning toward Ebenezer as a first name, for this climate, and toward deacons as a good, firm soil to plant the family tree in.

Indeed, it would seem as if Sharon must have been raised as a kind of Litchfield Ebenezer, for there is another name handed down to posterity in the fair bosom of our beautiful lake a mile north of the village: Ebenezer Mudge—the ancestor of Mudge Pond. They ought to have lived on some other pond—"the Mudges." The whole fam-

ily abandoned us before the Revolutionary War, and yet that exquisite touch of a name, "Mudge," is what we faithfully call our innocent lake by. The veriest wild Indian war-whoop of a name would be better, although you couldn't have hired a well-bred savage to call a *swamp* by such a bad, bad name as that. There is something very touching to me in this sad instance of what might be called unpoetic license, that such a lovely sheet of water should be handed down to posterity with such a sentimental blunder of a name—to be Mudgified by generation after generation, because Mrs. Ebenezer Mudge happened to make rye-bread in a cabin on its banks for a few seasons before they moved away; and if we have to call a public mass meeting this afternoon to do it, it seems to me that this favorite lake of

ours should be *un-Mudged* (great crises call for great men), even if we can't find anything better than the Indian name of a stream I know of in the West — "Squeetywagoogoo," I think—which was the Indian name for rum, and I suggest that a good way to christen it would be to pour all the "squeetywagoogoo" we can find into it, beginning at the parsonage place. I'll let our Congregational license go. Demoralizing to the fish? There is Scripture for it. I refer you to Matthew viii. 31, 32, and the devils of another day. Henceforth "Mudge" is dead to me. I call it Webotuck.

Here are a few stray motions on the records. (I don't mean lost motions.) For instance, as regards collection of salary:

VOTED, "That the collector of said tax shall be entitled to receive two and a half per cent. upon all

monies which he shall collect on said tax and pay into the treasury, provided he shall pay over the whole of said tax, deducting the abatements, and settle the same with the treasurer on or before the first day of January next."

There is no doubt in the minds of all fair-minded historians that we have had sinners in Sharon, but it gives one a kind of New Testament feeling to thus realize that we have had both publicans and sinners.

VOTED, "That a committee be appointed to seat the meeting-house—by dignity, age, and list."

Another vote on record was that all be seated according to "dignity, age, and *quality*." Note the striking and beautiful analogy between the Sharonites and the Apostles.

VOTED, "That no wooden foot-stoves be used nor admitted into the meeting-house, and that no foot-stoves be filled in the house during the time of religious worship."

Good thing for punctuality, foot-stoves! Might give a few away in our congregation.

VOTED, "That no person shall use tobacco in the house without providing spitting boxes."

There was a great deal of pious spitting in those days—but, you see, it was always done decently and in order.

VOTED, "That the committee be authorized to place tin pans under the stove-pipe to prevent its dripping."

VOTED, "That a committee be appointed to try and sell the bass viol belonging to the Society."

(Bass-viol suddenly growls in the gallery as its name is mentioned.) Its ghost seems to have risen to the occasion—that its name may not be taken in vain. Well, dear old bass-viol! though at first you seemed—to our unfiddled sanctity—a little *fiddlcish*,

you served us well and nobly, and we can truly say that we are glad we scraped an acquaintance with you—in the days of auld lang syne—and you certainly may speak in our meeting. You know our sign is, "Please be brief, but not silent." And you too, oh, sacred flute! (flute sounds) wont in the days gone by to take up our religious feelings and waft them out in breathy tootings over our listening ears—in notes so full, so divinely shrill, that they vibrated in the very marrow of our bones. Hail! old tooter! beloved discord of many memories! girls in the galleries! whispers in the choir! notes in the hymn books! We greet thee across the years!

The church has had four parsonages. The land was once given for "a parsonage to be erected thereon to be the residence"

(so says the agreement) "of ministers whose theological sentiments accord with the Confession of Faith at present established in this church." It was the evident intention to have an orthodox parsonage, at all events—if they should happen to fail on the orthodoxy of their ministers. Query, Why has the parsonage had to be moved so often?

VOTED, "That this Society pay the Rev. ——— for his services, Nov. 1st, and thereafter as money may be in the treasury from time to time, not needed for other purposes."

Passed. This looks a little as if the parsonage babies had to take their chances on getting new copper-toed shoes when the other children did, but it is explained away by saying that the salary had always been paid annually; and this was a concession—allowing the good dominie to put his hand

in the church pocket whenever he chose—if he could find anything there, lying around in a kind of loose "you-may-take-me-if-you-please" fashion. The church has always treated its pastors very handsomely—although, in taking a good long, historical perspective of a look at ourselves, we discover some things that we would not do over again.

But I fear the perspective is getting a little too long, and I must *begin* to begin to stop; but it takes so long to climb up into this pulpit that a man feels he must do something after he is here. I was told at breakfast this morning that my audience would think I was in heaven when I commenced to speak from this holy height; and I felt sure that you would wish I *was* before I was through, for I fear that most of you are going home a decidedly stiff-necked

people—especially those in the front seats. But the celebrating of this one hundred and fiftieth anniversary is so important an event, that so young a man as myself could hardly help feeling that this high old pulpit would have to be brought in to help him rise to the occasion; but I am sure that I have not set it on fire with my eloquence, in spite of the kerosene that it has been so freely cleansed and polished with. And as for your stiff necks—you will have the liniment of knowing that they are not half so stiff as—the same in your forefathers; for there were several more stories on this pulpit, in the palmy days of yore, and the sexton used to step from the pulpit into the gallery to do his dusting—or, rather, perhaps he did, or he *could* have done it; or, possibly, my dear brethren, he didn't at

all. I can't say that any one really ever saw it; but one thing I know, as I leave the solemn stateliness of this old desk, never have there been such flutterings and floppings of vain, empty thoughts as have winged their way out over it to you from the dim and misty regions of the past one hundred and fifty years!

I hope that I have offended none of the Chinamen in my audience this morning. I refer to the Chinese genius of a few men here and there in the world, who turn a healthy honor of the past into the morbid paganism of a thoroughly almond-eyed ancestor-worship; so that, in considering the past, we are standing, to their minds, in a cemetery on the edge of graves, and all the foibles of human nature that have been buried *have never been.* They are

wiped out by an epitaph, and men are gods when their tombstones are cut. I hope I am not irreverent, but I do not think so. All that the Past is for is the Present. I live in the hope that our follies and absurdities will teach the future, as well as our virtues. That is one way of atoning for them—the only way some of us have. And the man who loves his race as a kind of splendid larger self, a vast and glorious magnifying of the instincts of his own heart stretching over the ages, growing better with every one hundred and fifty years, is so sure of his love of those who have gone before that he feels he can afford to laugh a little at the smaller eccentricities of their ways, as only a far-off shadow of the eccentricities of his own. We smile but at portraits of ourselves fancifully taken in old-

fashioned clothes. It is this same ridiculous, old human nature of ours, with its stately-comic travesty on itself—kind of sadly laughable; grand even in its foolishness, and foolish ever in its grandeur! What a beautiful blunder we are! What a great glory of a mistake!

Man has ever been, and ever will be, his own fun and his own solemnity, his own disgrace and his own dignity; while all the years pass over him, with their exits and their entrances, he is ever the great tragi-comedy of existence, taking off his own follies, interpreting his own greatness, laughing and crying, striving and failing, strutting now in sublime littleness and bowing again in little sublimity—weaver of nonsense and heroism out of the weak-strong strangeness of his heart!

But while there is a good deal to smile over in this one hundred and fifty years, there is more to pray over, and many are the sermons folded away in events for our thoughtfulness.

The "Home" of our forefathers, for instance, was not, as is often the case with us, a place to be born in and to sleep in, and to come down late to breakfast in, just in time to rush off into the great hive-home of business. It was not a kind of natural restaurant in which to take meals, a place to be sick in, a place to be loved in when we are too tired for anything else; nor a place to cry in and be cross in and sweet in and petted in and scolded in until just old enough to get away, to make a home out of everywhere and a family out of every one. Well might this unconsciously home-

less boarding-house race of ours look back to the good old days when a family was started with somewhat of the feeling with which a colony was; and though the father was a little too much like a governor, he at least did his own the honor of seeing that God had given him a holier trust than ever a state can give a man. And well may we learn from them, that the largest responsibility there is in life is ever the soul of the child that we bring into the world, and that the heart of a boy or girl is a great unknown continent of a possibility, and that there is no office that man gives to his fellows so sacred with responsibility and so momentous with consequences as that office which God gives to thousands of men and women—the kingliness of being father to a soul and the queenliness of

being mother to a human heart, and the kingdom of a home! And again, while our ancestors, making an intense business of religion, were a little apt to feel that they could let it go a little after business hours, and that God was on one side and a good time on the other, we are reminded that real religion is the genius of intense earnestness and looks down into the great deeps and sees the chasms there, and then looks *up* into the great deeps and sees the *love* there; and it is not, like some of ours, a pious thoughtlessness and a kind of conscientious carelessness, but a deep thing —a glorious sad-glad knowledge, and not a butterfly peace fluttering over small things, happy in not seeing great ones. A worshipful and beautiful seriousness, a vast, incalculable, wonderful, unworded solemnity,

this religion of ours! They teach us this, and, while the Puritan made God a kind of infinite and eternal Puritan Himself, and often, under the extravagances of the doctrine of election, a great, fickle Arbitrariness, selecting and rejecting souls with a kind of autocratic, infinite unreasonableness, without reference to their pleadings sometimes, it is certainly better than the modern infant-class God—a great Sentimentality far away in the heavens—who, in a kind of vast weak-mindedness, wants everybody to be good and hopes they will, but doesn't quite know what to do about it if they are not. And which is worse—the old way of almost thinking that God would take advantage of men, or the new way of treating Him as a kind of Infinite Convenience, and supposing that men can take advan-

tage of Him? The one was stupidity of mind, but this is meanness of spirit.

We can learn from one of the mistakes of our ancestors that the only religion that can live is one that is as broad as human life, and that no religion can make itself a special faculty of the soul; but, would it live, it must be of all the faculties combined—making a specialty of observing one God.

It was the blunder of their methods that they tried to get a man away from his life over into religion—instead of trying to get his religion over into his life. The religion needs the life, and the life needs the religion.

They teach us, also, the force and value of definite convictions, and their superb solidity makes its own comments—standing rock-like under our theology of beautiful

mist, and vast, glorious, shining vagueness; and, while we would not go back to them, they enforce the lesson that they needed us and we need them, and that the only safe liberal man is the very intense and earnest one, and the only safe earnest man is the truly liberal one.

Looking over these years, we but learn again that it takes all the epochs to spell out God, and that religion is a kind of rainbow arching across the ages, each century putting in its own particular color; but it takes the adding of them all together to bring out the glory of beautiful blendings, reaching from horizon to horizon, that exist in the nature of God. And it comes to me in another way—that years are a sort of books, each coming with its copy to each of us, never to be copied again. We have the "Century

Dictionary," but we have also another dictionary—great, massive folios issued from heaven, the dictionary of the centuries—which God is writing, of infinite meanings, out of human event and experience, and we have been turning over the last one hundred and fifty pages and looking up some of the references—and the new words God has been writing there for the souls of men.

God is always writing. He is the Great Author. The Bible is only one of His Primers, and all history is a massive publication of God's love, God's interest in us—publishing the Bible over again in a new and more gigantic form, in the sublime, God-like realism of what actually takes place in the world; the Bible, translated into events, and into a thousand thousand tongues of human experience. The Bible, so far as the canon

is concerned, closes with the Revelation of John; but history is the Revelation of God; and the ages, as they roll on, are an ever mightier inspiration. God in History is taking the whole human race for a deep, broad wonder of an apostle, and inspiring it to speak from its own great heart to its own great Self and the brooding greater greatness of the future.

This is the last day in our one hundred and fifty years. To-morrow is the birthday of a new history—and of the new series God begins, for us, of the blessings yet to be. God is with us. The Past is with us. One hundred and fifty years are assembled in this sacredness—and the 1,200 souls that have waited in this church, on their way to heaven, watch over us with the deep and tender benediction of all their prayers, their

strivings, and their triumphs. The real history of this church has been written by God in a nobler, deeper language than my words can feel their way to. Human lives! God's words! I would that, in solemn and still processional winding through this pulpit, one by one, I could cause the spirits of these lives to pass before you; for the real history begins where my words leave off. It would be like gathering the sunshine of the sunny days of one hundred and fifty years. The earth feels it, but the sunny days are gone; God has gathered them unto Himself. We can only have more like them. One hundred and fifty years of blunders and blessings—blessed blunders, blunderings blessed! Oh, this wondrous maze of good and evil that we call the human heart! this strange intricacy of things from another world, of forces and

weaknesses, trying to puzzle its dim-lighted way across Time into Eternity, under the love of God, to the destination of things! Out of our honor, out of our disgrace, out of our prayers, out of our hopes and despairs, out of our prejudices and charities, God is working wonders in a kind of divinely wilful way—of having everything come out rightly in spite of us!

One hundred and fifty years seems long to us, but to God it is only one of the touches of His sublime love upon the human spirit, out of countless ones across the ages. We look back out of our newness this morning upon this oldness of one hundred and fifty years ago, but our newness is but another oldness yet to be. It is *we* who are new and old; but all that belongs to God moves majesti-

cally on above these very human words. This church belongs to God; and long after the elms on our village streets have dropped away, and many new corner-stones have been laid, this church will live on, standing at the door-way of life, and leading the generations each as they come unto Him. A church is the best symbol of Eternity we have in Time. Generations, to a church, are but what years are to the spirit of a man, while thousands of members who are born into it, and live out the meaning of their threescore and ten, die away and are no more; but the church lives on, lives on like some great spirit that can never die, while the souls of men are but thoughts and feelings that come and go across it.

We stand under the halo of the past. Stepping into the pastorate of this church,

a great wave of awe comes over me to-day; and I am young—wonderfully young! Holy with traditions and rich with memories, I stand like a little child under this mighty Past, like a child entering a great cathedral —time-hallowed arches reaching over him— afraid of his own small voice, echoing childishly across the wide, still reaches of all that has gone before; and the great, deep heart of this church, speaking across all the silences of these beautiful years, makes my heart stand still. Who am I—who are you—to take up the glory of this Past and hand it on through the sweetness of our lives to the waiting Future?

Will it be a broken link—a sad parenthesis—of God's looking the other way?

God has given us the Past. The Future belongs to God. And it belongs to us—

to us in Him, and to Him in us. And, lo! the years, like prophets, come to meet us, preaching a greater nobility to be, out of the nobility that hath been; and, lo! the lives that have gone before, linking with souls this church to heaven, seem but a kind of living, loving logic, linking heaven to us: promises gone before of what we may be. They have given the direction and the impulse. We have only to be true.

The best celebration of the last one hundred and fifty years will be the next one hundred and fifty years.

Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to tell them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be.